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His or Her Divorce? The Gendered Nature of Divorce and its Determinants

Matthijs Kalmijn and Anne-Rigt Poortman

Contrary to previous studies treating divorce as a couple's decision, we make a distinction between 'his', 'her', and 'their' divorce by using information about who initiated divorce. Using competing risk analysis, we re-examine four well-known determinants of divorce: (i) the wife's employment, (ii) the financial situation of the household, (iii) the presence of children, and (iv) the quality of the match. Because existing arguments on the underlying mechanisms focus on the relative costs and benefits of a divorce for the wife, the husband and/or the couple, this approach offers new insights into the validity of competing theories. Our results confirm some theoretical interpretations, but they refute others. Furthermore, our findings shed light on the gendered nature of divorce. We not only find that women more often take the initiative to divorce, we also find that many social and economic determinants have stronger effects on 'her' divorce than on 'his' divorce. The one exception is children, which seem to affect men's decision to (not) divorce more strongly than women's decision.

Introduction

Most empirical analyses of the determinants of divorce treat divorce as an event. Authors typically employ event-history models in which the dependent variable is the conditional odds of experiencing a divorce in a given year rather than not experiencing a divorce (Waite and Lillard, 1991; Hoem, 1997; Ono, 1998; Berrington and Diamond, 1999; Brines and Joyner, 1999; South, 2001; Poortman and Kalmijn, 2002; Wagner and Weiss, 2003). The regression coefficients in these models show how much the divorce risk is reduced or increased by changes in the independent variable. Although this is a standard method of analysing why people divorce, it tells us little about how the decision to divorce was made. In this study, we take a different approach of identifying the determinants of divorce by focusing on the question of whether the husband, the wife, or both spouses were the initiator of the divorce. We employ event-history models in which information on the decision process is incorporated. More specifically, our dependent variable is not simply the conditional odds of experiencing a divorce (instead of not experiencing a divorce), but rather the conditional odds of experiencing a certain type of divorce: a divorce initiated by the husband, a divorce initiated by the wife, or a divorce initiated by husband and wife together.

There are two reasons why this approach can contribute to our understanding of divorce. Differences between men and women in the degree to which they initiate a divorce tell us something about gender differences in marriage. Several decades ago, when divorce rates were beginning to increase, sociologists argued that a marriage is in fact composed of two different marriages, 'his'

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and 'her' marriage (Bernard, 1976). It was believed that men and women not only had different perceptions of the way their marriage was organized, they would also gain different benefits from marriage, with the husband benefiting and the wife benefiting less or even being harmed by marriage. Many sophisticated studies have been done since then on the positive and negative effects of marriage on outcomes ranging from happiness and loneliness to health and suicide (Waite, 1995; Joung, 1996; Peters and Liefbroer, 1997; England, 2000; Simon, 2002; Williams and Umberson, 2004). Most studies find positive effects of marriage, but debate remains about whether men and women benefit equally (England, 2000; Waite and Gallagher, 2000).

Gender differences in the benefits of marriage also play a role in the debate about the rise in divorce. Several authors have argued that the rise in divorce is in part due to the growing autonomy of women in society, which gave them more room to respond to the presumably meagre benefits they were getting out of marriage (e.g. Ruggles, 1997). Parallel to the distinction between 'his' and 'her' marriage, we can therefore make a distinction between 'his' and 'her' divorce. Such a distinction, we believe, provides alternative evidence on the degree to which there are differences in the benefits that men and women gain from marriage. Moreover, exploring the determinants of 'his' and 'her' divorce separately can provide further insight into the causes of such gender differences.

A second reason why it is important to incorporate information about the decision process is more theoretical. The literature in past decades has focused on the social and economic determinants of divorce risks, in part because such variables play a potentially important role in explaining the trend in divorce. Examples of such variables are whether the couple has children, the age at marriage, and the employment of the wife. A problem with such analyses is that there are often multiple and typically competing theoretical mechanisms involved. For example, the employment of the wife has a positive effect on divorce, but this may be due to considerations of specialization, to the wife's economic independence, or to the husband's disapproval of a working wife (e.g. South, 2001). While it is important to document the employment effect, the effect itself tells us little about which theory is most likely to be true. Because these different interpretations are directed specifically to the marital costs and benefits for wives, husbands, and couples, we gain additional insight into the underlying theoretical mechanisms if we analyse the effects of standard determinants not simply on the risk of divorce, but on the type of divorce as well.

The data we analyse come from a retrospective life-course survey of men and women in the Netherlands. The data include detailed and dynamic information about important social and economic characteristics of respondents and their (former) partner. In addition, several questions were asked about the divorce process, including questions about who took the first step in the process. Note that this question is more informative than the more frequently asked question about who files for divorce first (Goode, 1993). Our measure relates to a point earlier in the divorce process and is therefore more closely related to the causes of divorce. During later stages of the divorce process spouses may negotiate and make arrangements about how to officially settle the divorce, thereby blurring spouses' initial interests in the divorce.

Theoretical Background

Following common theoretical work on divorce, we argue that the risk of divorce depends on the perceived benefits of remaining married vis-à-vis the perceived benefits of being outside the marriage, which is either being unmarried or being married to someone else. When we speak of benefits, we refer to net benefits, that is, benefits minus costs. If the difference between the net benefits of marriage and the net benefits of being outside of marriage – what we call the *perceived relative benefits of marriage* – is negative, a divorce may occur. Important to emphasize is that people can have different perceptions of similar benefits.

When the perceived relative benefits of the two spouses are cross-classified, several combinations are possible, and for the sake of simplicity, we categorize these into four groups: (i) both spouses have negative perceived relative benefits, (ii) the husband has negative benefits, the wife positive benefits, (iii) the husband has positive benefits, the wife negative benefits, and (iv) both have positive benefits. Our general assumption is that the person who has negative perceived relative benefits is more likely to take part in the initiative to divorce. Hence, we expect a higher chance of 'his' divorce in case (ii), a higher chance of 'her' divorce in case (iii), and a higher chance of a 'joint' divorce in case (i).

The reasoning above assumes that there is a simple relation between having an interest in the divorce on the one hand, and taking initiative to do so on the other hand. Although older small-scale studies suggest that this relationship is quite substantial (Pettit and Bloom, 1984), there are several reasons why this relation is more

complicated. We do not examine these reasons empirically but we do review the most important theoretical arguments.

The relationship is complicated in two ways: People may not take the initiative even if their interests tell them to do so and people may not tell the researcher honestly about who took the initiative. The direction of bias is not directly clear. First, people have a tendency to protect their self-esteem. If the spouse has an interest in the divorce, a person may decide to take (part in) the initiative because a unilateral divorce decision by the spouse threatens one's self-esteem. For similar reasons, persons may overstate their role in the initiative to the researcher. It has been suggested that overstatements of own initiative are a form of taking control over the situation retroactively and that such behaviour facilitates coping with the divorce (Gray and Silver, 1990). Second, there is the self-serving bias (Campbell *et al.*, 2000). People often avoid being blamed for the divorce decision because a divorce is generally considered a failure. This may lead to a tendency to let the spouse do the breaking up when there are in fact joint interests in the divorce. More importantly, it may motivate a person to blame the spouse even if he or she took (part in) the initiative. The direction of the self-esteem bias is toward ego, whereas the direction of the self-serving bias is away from ego. It is difficult to say what this implies for the frequency distribution of answers.

On the basis of prevailing theories on divorce we develop predictions about how effects of four well-known determinants of divorce may differ between 'his', 'her', and 'their' divorce. The factors we consider are: (i) the employment of the wife, (ii) the financial situation of the household, (iii) the presence of children, and (iv) the quality of the match. In the theoretical discussion below, we use the following short-hand notation for the three types of effects: (J) effect on a 'joint' divorce versus no divorce, (M) effect on a 'male' divorce versus no divorce, (F) effect on a 'female' divorce versus no divorce.

Employment of the Wife

One of the most frequently discussed hypotheses concerns the employment of the wife. Wife's employment is generally found to increase the chances to divorce (South, 2001; Blossfeld and Muller, 2002; Poortman and Kalmijn, 2002; Wagner and Weiss, 2003; Rogers, 2004). There are many reasons why this is so, but economic and cultural arguments have been dominant. The most influential economic argument comes from microeconomics and argues that the benefits of marriage largely derive from task specialization (Becker, 1981). When married women begin participating in the labour market, the benefits of specialization in marriage decline. Because specialization gains accrue to both spouses (Becker, 1981), it implies that women's employment should primarily affect the odds of a joint divorce.

Another economic hypothesis focuses on the economic independence that is obtained from outside employment. Women with a strong labour market position have relatively small financial exit costs, which makes it easier to dissolve an unsatisfactory marriage (Cherlin, 1979; Oppenheimer, 1994). Because the economic independence argument applies primarily to the wife, we expect that a strong labour market position of the wife increases the odds of a female divorce, while it does not increase the odds of a male divorce or a joint divorce (for a similar argument, see Rogers, 2004).

Outside employment might not only lead to lower financial costs of a divorce, it may also change the perceptions of those costs. For example, employment could strengthen women in their belief that they are competent and capable of establishing an independent household (e.g. Kessler and McRae, 1982) and this may lower the threshold to divorce. In a sense, employment not only increases women's economic independence, it also increases their psychological independence, and this increases the chances of 'her' divorce by decreasing the *perceived* costs of divorce.

The dominant cultural argument about wife's employment is derived from older sociological studies about gender roles. Given that couples adhere to a traditional gender role ideology, husbands will have difficulty accepting the wife's employment, particularly when this employment cannot be perceived as temporary or secondary to the household income (for a classic statement, see Komarovsky, 1962). Husbands may perceive their wife's career as competing with their own occupational position. In addition, their identity, which is often strongly tied to their breadwinner role, may be threatened (Parsons, 1949). Because this argument applies primarily to the husband, it implies that a wife's strong labour market position increases the odds of a male divorce, while it does not increase the female or joint divorce odds.

The reasoning above leads to conflicting predictions. If the specialization mechanism is more important than the independence and cultural mechanisms, the joint divorce odds should be more strongly affected than the male or female divorce odds (J>M and J>F). If the independence mechanism is more important, the female divorce odds should be more strongly affected than the

male and joint divorce odds (F>M and F>J). If the cultural mechanism is more important, the male divorce odds should be more strongly affected (M>F and M>J).

Financial Situation of the Household

Several authors have suggested a negative income effect on divorce. Evidence for this hypothesis has been obtained by examining effects of variables such as household income, husband's unemployment, and direct measures of financial problems. This hypothesis argues that couples in a poor financial position are more likely to divorce than couples in a better financial position. The evidence has been moderately supportive of this hypothesis (Broman *et al.*, 1990; Hoffman and Duncan, 1995; Ono, 1998). The income effect can be accounted for by two mechanisms. The first has to do with cultural arguments about gender roles. A poor financial position can often be attributed to the husband being unable to provide for his family. Financial problems are a potential threat to the husband's role as breadwinner. And just as wife's employment may be disapproved of by the husband, the husband's inability to provide for his family may be disapproved of by the wife.

A different line of reasoning focuses on couple considerations. When the financial means in the household are limited, there are more financial worries and couples will have a difficult time making ends meet. It is generally expected that financial difficulties lead to economic strain, which in turn has negative consequences for the degree of harmony in marriage (Conger *et al.*, 1990; Voydanoff, 1990). This leads to more marital conflict, lower marital satisfaction and a corresponding increase in the chance of divorce.

These arguments lead to different predictions. If the cultural mechanism is true – the wife disapproves of the husband not fulfilling his breadwinner role – we would expect to find stronger effects of the couple's financial position on the odds of a female divorce than on the odds of a male or a joint divorce (F>M and F>J). If the economic strain mechanism is true, effects of the financial position should be stronger on the odds of a joint divorce than on the odds of a male or female divorce (J>M and J>F). A further specification of the economic strains argument could be made on the basis of a gender difference in the perception of these strains. Particularly, it has been argued that women are more sensitive than men to internal problems within marriage (Amato and Rogers, 1997). If this is true, we might also suspect that the female odds are more strongly affected than the male odds (J>F>M). This is a special case of J>M and J>F.

Presence of Children

A third, often-studied, hypothesis concerns the bonding effect of children. Numerous studies have shown that couples with children are less likely to divorce than childless couples, in particular when these children are still young (Heaton, 1990; Remez, 1990; Waite and Lillard, 1991; Kalmijn, 1999). Children are generally believed to function as a form of marital capital that ties spouses together. Dependencies are different for men and women, however. One mechanism is economic and is based on the fact that the financial costs of divorce are higher for women who have children. Divorced women with children living at home are less likely to be employed and will therefore be in a poorer financial position (Holden and Smock, 1991; Smock, 1994; Poortman, 2000). Another mechanism is social and argues that the social costs of divorce are higher for men who have children. Fathers rarely have custody and do not see their children often after divorce. The losses after a divorce are therefore higher for fathers than for men who do not yet have children (Seltzer, 1991; Lye, 1996; Kalmijn, 1999).

The implications of these arguments are different depending on whose benefits and costs we focus on. If the economic mechanism is more important than the social argument, the female odds should be affected more strongly by children than the male or joint odds (F>M and F>J). If the social mechanism is more important than the economic argument, the male odds should be affected more strongly (M>F and M>J).

The Quality of the Match

A fourth influential hypothesis addresses the quality of the match. The argument here is that the better a person has searched on the marriage market, the better the quality of the match, and the lower the chance of divorce (Becker, 1981). Important indicators for match quality are the age at which spouses married, the time it took them to get to know each other, and the degree of homogamy. Studies have shown that people who marry young or after a short acquaintance period are more likely to divorce (Brüderl *et al.*, 1997).

The implication of this argument is that a poorer quality of the match will lower the relative benefits of marriage for both spouses. Hence, we would expect to find stronger effects of match quality variables, like age at marriage and acquaintance period, on the odds of a joint divorce than on the odds of a unilateral divorce. Although a poor match quality results in lower relative benefits of marriage for both spouses, it is not necessarily

true that husband and wife will perceive their relationship in a similar way. Because women might be more sensitive toward marital problems than men (Amato and Rogers, 1997), we expect that poor match quality will affect the odds of a female divorce more than it affect the odds of a male divorce. We thus expect that match quality variables increase the odds of a joint divorce more than the odds of a unilateral divorce, but that a female divorce is more affected than a male divorce (J>F>M).

We also look at age differences between spouses. In past research, age differences have been found to increase the chance to divorce (Janssen *et al.*, 1999). Couples with large age differences are more unstable, and this effect is stronger for couples in which women are much older than for couples in which men are much older. Because age differences affect the quality of the relationship, we believe that age differences will increase the chance of a joint divorce. Whether the male or female risks are affected more is not clear beforehand. On the one hand, one could argue that women are more sensitive to marital problems, implying that the effect of age differences is greater on the odds of a female divorce than on the odds of a male divorce (J>F>M). On the other hand, men tend to report somewhat stronger preferences regarding the partner's age than women. In other words, men and women might have different perceptions of the costs and benefits associated with age differences. Although both men and women prefer the case where the husband is older to the case where the husband is younger, these preferences are stronger for men (South, 1991; Vossen, 1999). This suggests that the effects may be stronger for a male than for a female divorce (J>M>F).

Data

We analyse a retrospective life-history survey from the Netherlands (Kalmijn *et al.*, 2000). The sample was based on a selection of 19 municipalities, which were representative of the Dutch population with respect to region and urbanization. From the population registers of these municipalities, three random samples were drawn: (i) a sample of first married persons, (ii) a sample of divorced persons who were not remarried, and (iii) a sample of remarried persons. Because divorced persons could be over sampled beforehand, the sample size of the survey was smaller than what it would have been in a normal random sample. The oversample obviously increases the proportion of divorced persons in the sample, but it should not affect differences in divorce probabilities across subgroups. As a result, tests of hypotheses will not be affected.

We limited the analysis to first marriages (i.e. persons either in a first marriage or separated from a first marriage). After excluding cases with missing data on central characteristics (i.e. type of divorce and work history), the sample consists of 942 male respondents and 1293 female respondents. As is often the case, data on former spouses were obtained from respondents' reports. This reduces the amount of information we were able to obtain on the spouse. Our data on the life histories of respondents are therefore more detailed than our data on the life histories of the (former) spouses.

Measures of His, Her, and Their divorce

Earlier qualitative research suggests that people generally have little difficulty in identifying who took the initiative in the divorce process (Hopper, 1993). To measure this in our structured survey interviews, we asked the following question, which refers to the early stages of the divorce process: '*In the divorce process, it sometimes occurs that one of the two spouses takes the first step. In your case, who first made the decision to separate? Was that you, your partner, or you and your partner more or less simultaneously?*'

Results presented in Table 1 show that women more often take the initiative than men (61 per cent versus 29 per cent). Joint divorces are relatively rare (10 per cent). When we compare men and women, we see that women more often report own-initiative than partner-initiative, while men report own-initiative almost as often as partner-initiative. Men also report more joint initiative than women do. Because the male and female data are both based on random samples of the ever-divorced population in the 19 municipalities, the differences we find are probably related to measurement error. On the one hand, women may have had a tendency to protect their self-esteem by claiming initiative that they in fact did not have. On the other hand, men may attribute the initiative to their wife even if they themselves took the first step. It is most likely that a combination of the two biases occurs. If the truth lies in the middle, we can conclude that women are about twice as likely to take the initiative to divorce as men, a substantial difference.

To what extent is there a correspondence between initiative and the perceived net benefits of divorce? In the interview, we asked respondents to assess what their attitude was at the time of the divorce: Were they in favour of the divorce, were they against the divorce, or

Table 1 Frequency distribution of who takes the initiative for the divorce by gender

	Combined	Women reporting	Men reporting
Wife took initiative	60.8	75.5	46.0
Husband took initiative	28.8	17.3	40.3
Both took initiative	10.5	7.2	13.7
Total	100	100	100
n	1700	1015	685

Note: The combined percentage is the average of the male and female percentages.
Source: Divorce in the Netherlands, 1998.

Table 2 Association between taking initiative and spouses' evaluation of the divorce decision at the time of divorce

	Ego more positive	Both positive	Spouse more positive
Ego took initiative	94.0	54.0	15.0
Both took initiative	3.0	23.0	6.0
Spouse took initiative	2.0	23.0	79.0
Total	100	100	100
n	753	474	461

Notes: The correlation is r = 0.72. Number of divorces does not equal 1700 due to 12 respondents who have missing data on the evaluation variable.
Source: Divorce in the Netherlands, 1998.

were they somewhere in between these extremes? A similar question was used to assess what the respondent thinks the spouse thought of the divorce. We combined the two attitude items into one variable with the following categories: (1) respondent more positive about the divorce than the spouse, (2) both more or less positive about the divorce, and (3) the spouse more positive about the divorce than the respondent. There are also a few cases where both spouses were negative about the divorce, and these are included in category 2. To assess the association, we code the initiative variable from 1 (own initiative) to 3 (partner initiative). The cross-tabulation between the two measures is presented in Table 2.

Table 2 confirms that when ego is more positive, it was virtually always ego who took the initiative. When the spouse was more positive, it was mostly the spouse who took the initiative, although to a lesser extent. The lowest degree of consistency is found for cases where both spouses were positive about the divorce decision. Here too, we see a tendency toward ego-initiative, but what is more important is that we underestimate joint initiative. However this may be, we note that the correlation between the two measures is 0.72, which is high. Although there may be some tendency toward retrospective alignment of answers on such questions, the correlation points to a substantial degree of overlap between the degree of initiative and the attitudes people have toward their divorce. This gives us confidence in the applicability of our theoretical approach. The only caveat we should make is that joint interests will sometimes be included in the category of unilateral initiative.

Additional analyses using information about who filed for divorce, which refers to later stages of the divorce process, further substantiates our confidence in measuring initiative early in the divorce process. The question about who filed for divorce may capture benefits of the legal divorce settlement rather than initial marital benefits, and is only moderately correlated with our measure for divorce initiative (r = 0.63). Furthermore, the correlation between filing for divorce and spouses' attitudes towards divorce is lower (r = 0.48) than the correlation between our measure of taking initiative and spouses' attitudes toward divorce found in Table 2 (r = 0.72). Hence, initiative early in the divorce process is more closely related to the theoretical notion of marital benefits.

Models and Measures of the Independent Variables

We use competing risk analyses to test our hypotheses. To this aim, we constructed a person-period file, with years as the unit, starting with the year of marriage and ending with the survey year (if still married) or the separation year (if divorced) and applied multinomial logistic regression analysis. Note that divorce refers to the moment when the couple stopped living together. Three types of divorce are distinguished in the analyses: her divorce (initiated by the wife), his divorce (initiated by the husband) and joint divorce (initiated by both spouses). These three types of divorces are treated in the analyses as separate categories of the dependent variable and a distinction can be made between: (1) the conditional probability of her divorce versus staying married, (2) the conditional probability of his divorce versus staying married, and (3) the conditional probability of a joint divorce versus staying married. The multinomial logistic regression model for the person-period data approximates a continuous-time competing risk model (Yamaguchi, 1991). We present coefficients for each of the three equations as well as Wald tests indicating whether the coefficients differ between pairs of equations.

The models include the following measures for the theoretically considered variables.

Employment of the wife. Wife's working hours – a time-varying variable indicating how many hours per week the wife works for pay during marriage, ranging from 0 to 40. This variable has been constructed on the basis of the respondent's complete work history. Because we lack data on the complete work history of the spouse, this variable only refers to female respondents and is only included in the analyses of a sub-sample of female respondents.

Financial situation of the household. Financial difficulties – whether the respondent experienced the following financial problems during the first years of marriage: (i) difficulty in making ends meet, (ii) not being able to quickly replace broken items, (iii) whether they had to borrow money for necessary expenditures, (iv) whether they were behind with payments for rent/mortgage or gas/water/electricity, (v) whether they had visits from creditors, and (vi) whether they had received financial support from friends or family. On the basis of these six items, we constructed a scale counting the number of financial problems, ranging from 0 to 6 (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.75$).

Presence of children. Presence and age of children – a time-varying set of mutually exclusive variables using information about whether there are children living at home and the age of the youngest child. Five groups are distinguished: (i) no children (reference group), (ii) children living at home and youngest child 0–6 years old, (iii) children living at home and youngest child 7–12 years old, (iv) children living at home and youngest child 13 years or older, and (v) all children left the parental home (i.e. empty nest).

Married young. Whether the average age at marriage of husband and wife was 20 years or younger.

Duration of acquaintance. The number of years the couple was dating before they got married in case couples did not cohabit before marriage. In case of premarital cohabitation, the cohabitation period (also measured in years) is added to the dating period.

Age differences between spouses. Measured by distinguishing three groups: (i) husband more than five years older than the wife, (ii) wife more than one year older than the husband, and (iii) other combinations (the reference group). Because there are relatively few couples in which the husband is younger than the wife, the cut-off point is set to an age difference of only one year rather than five years.

All models control for: marital duration and duration squared (measured in years; a quadratic parameterization fits the data best), calendar year (measured in years), whether the couple cohabitated prior to marriage, whether both spouses were church members at the time of marriage, whether the couple lived in a city in the beginning of marriage, a premarital pregnancy, and the educational level of husband and wife (measured in years). Means and standard deviations of all independent variables are presented in Table 3.

Results

Two models are estimated: a model for men and women combined, which does not include the variable working hours (Table 4), and a model for women only, which includes the variable working hours (Table 5). Otherwise, the models are similar. The last model is added because we only have dynamic work data for women in case of female respondents.

Important to note is that the significance of the effects in Tables 4 and 5 depends upon the number of events. The effects on a female divorce are therefore more likely to be significant than the effects on a male divorce. The effects on a joint divorce are least likely to be significant (about 10 per cent of the events). Hence, the magnitude of the effects and the tests for differences in the effects across equations are more informative.

Table 3 Means and standard deviations of the independent variables: combined sample

	Mean	Standard deviation	Time-varying
Duration marriage	0.00	0.00	Yes
Period	30.37	11.02	Yes
Premarital cohabitation	0.35		No
Church membership	0.44		No
Urbanized residence	0.69		No
Premarital pregnancy	0.09		No
Wife's education	10.80	2.76	No
Husband's education	11.45	3.03	No
Wife's working hours[a]	30.32	15.89	Yes
Financial problems	1.05	1.47	No
Children 0–6	0.13		Yes
Children 6–12	0.00		Yes
Children 12–18	0.00		Yes
Empty nest	0.00		Yes
Married young	0.09		No
Duration of acquaintance	3.40	2.63	No
Wife younger	0.18		No
Husband younger	0.09		No

[a]*Based on female sample (n = 1290 in first year of marriage).*

Notes: For time-varying variables means apply to the first year of marriage (n = 2229). Standard deviations not reported for dichotomous variables.
Source: Divorce in the Netherlands, 1998.

First, we observe that there is a significant positive effect of the wife's working hours on the odds of a female divorce (Table 5). In other words, the more hours the wife works, the more likely it is that she will end the marriage. The male odds to divorce are not affected and the difference between the two coefficients (the effect on a female divorce minus the effect on a male divorce) is significant. We also observe that the joint odds to divorce are affected in a positive fashion, but the number of cases is too small to make this effect or differences with the other effects significant. These results suggest that an interpretation of the employment effect in terms of women's economic or psychological independence is more plausible than an interpretation in terms of normative disapproval by the husband.

Our second hypothesis addresses the role of financial difficulties for marital stability. Tables 4 and 5 show that couples with financial difficulties are more likely to divorce than other couples. This effect is strongest for the odds of a female divorce. Note, however, that the differences between the coefficients are not large enough to be significant. Given the large differences in the magnitude of the effects, we are tempted to conclude that these results are in line with the notion that wives disapprove of a husband who fails to provide for his family. The results are less consistent with an interpretation in terms of economic strain, which should affect both partners and, hence, implies the strongest effect on the odds of a joint divorce. Because an auxiliary hypothesis was that women are more sensitive to economic strains, the stronger effects on a female divorce could also be interpreted as support for the idea that women are more sensitive to marital problems.

Third, we examine the influence of children on divorce. Table 4 shows that couples with children, and especially young children, are less likely to divorce than other couples. All three types of divorce are affected, but the odds of a male divorce are affected more strongly than the odds of a female divorce. For young children, the difference between the male and female coefficients is marginally significant. We argued that children increase the economic exit costs for women and the social exit costs for men. Although both notions are valid given the strong effects on all types of divorce, the differences we observe are more supportive of the social mechanism than they are supportive of the economic mechanism.

We argued that aspects of the quality of the match should primarily affect the odds of a joint divorce. The results in Table 4 are generally not in line with this expectation. A young age at marriage has a positive effect on divorce, as expected, but the effect is more or

Table 4 Competing risk models for divorces initiated by the wife, husband or both: combined sample

	By wife	By husband	By both	P value for Wald test of differences		
	b	b	b	Wife–Husband	Wife–Both	Husband–Both
Duration dependency						
Duration	0.100*	0.154*	0.095*	0.04*	0.91	0.17
Duration squared	–0.004*	–0.005*	–0.004*	0.10†	0.80	0.44
Central independent variables						
Financial problems	0.080*	0.039	0.026	0.32	0.38	0.85
Children 0–6	–0.642*	–0.931*	–0.854*	0.07†	0.36	0.76
Children 6–12	–0.333*	–0.523*	–0.319	0.36	0.97	0.55
Children 12–18	–0.092	–0.267	0.287	0.48	0.31	0.16
Empty nest	0.768*	0.690*	0.874†	0.83	0.85	0.76
Married young	0.276*	0.200	0.208	0.70	0.82	0.98
Duration of acquaintance	–0.046*	–0.001	–0.033	0.07†	0.72	0.42
Wife younger	0.149†	–0.422*	–0.374	0.00*	0.04*	0.87
Husband younger	–0.044	0.140	0.559*	0.36	0.02*	0.13
Control variables						
Woman reporting	0.625*	–0.715*	–0.526*	0.00*	0.00*	0.31
Period	0.059*	0.055*	0.062*	0.62	0.78	0.57
Premarital cohabitation	0.396*	0.334*	0.604*	0.67	0.32	0.24
Church membership	–0.303*	–0.398*	–0.769*	0.44	0.02*	0.08†
Urbanized residence	0.246*	0.163	0.244	0.53	0.99	0.71
Wife's education	0.030*	–0.053*	–0.055	0.00*	0.02*	0.97
Husband's education	–0.034*	0.039*	0.046	0.00*	0.02*	0.84
Premarital pregnancy	0.144	0.036	–0.246	0.60	0.26	0.45
Constant	–6.251*	–6.248*	–7.345*			
Model						
Number of events	1081	452	167			
Number of person-periods	34657	34657	34657			
Log likelihood	–7655	–7655	–7655			

*$P < 0.05$; †$P < 0.10$.

Source: Divorce in the Netherlands 1998.

Table 5 Competing risk models for divorces initiated by the wife, husband or both: female sample

	By wife	By husband	By both	*P* value for Wald test of differences		
	b	b	b	Wife–Husband	Wife–Both	Husband–Both
Duration dependency						
Duration	0.116*	0.186*	0.038	0.08†	0.17	0.02*
Duration squared	–0.004*	–0.005*	–0.002	0.54	0.34	0.22
Central independent variables						
Wife's working hours	0.010*	–0.004	0.005	0.01*	0.55	0.33
Financial problems	0.088*	0.014	0.004	0.25	0.35	0.92
Children 0–6	–0.422*	–0.682*	–0.564†	0.30	0.69	0.77
Children 6–12	–0.246†	–0.674*	–0.172	0.17	0.88	0.35
Children 12–18	0.025	–0.373	0.547	0.25	0.33	0.12
Empty nest	0.512†	–0.845	–0.214	0.03*	0.50	0.59
Married young	0.272*	0.095	–0.217	0.60	0.38	0.62
Duration of acquaintance	–0.048*	0.057†	–0.028	0.00*	0.71	0.15
Wife younger	0.090	–0.360	–0.957*	0.09†	0.02*	0.24
Husband younger	–0.150	0.763*	1.022*	0.00*	0.00*	0.51
Control variables						
Period	0.051*	0.068*	0.101*	0.17	0.01*	0.12
Premarital cohabitation	0.398*	0.181	0.267	0.35	0.69	0.82
Church membership	–0.301*	–0.454*	–0.632*	0.43	0.26	0.59
Urbanized residence	0.253*	0.353†	1.109*	0.62	0.02*	0.05*
Wife's education	0.040*	–0.002	–0.068	0.28	0.06†	0.31
Husband's education	–0.042*	0.017	–0.034	0.07†	0.87	0.35
Premarital pregnancy	0.117	0.094	–0.308	0.94	0.45	0.52
Constant	–5.747*	–8.577*	–8.980*			
Model						
Number of events	766	176	73			
Number of person-periods	19892	19892	19892			
Log likelihood	–4380	–4380	–4380			

*$P < 0.05$; †$P < 0.10$.

Source: Divorce in the Netherlands 1998.

less the same for each of the three odds. The Wald tests in Tables 4 and 5 confirm that the effect on a joint divorce is not stronger than the effects on a unilateral divorce.

Another important indicator of match quality is the length of time the couple knew each other before they began to live together. This variable has the expected negative effect in Table 4: the longer the couple was acquainted, the less likely a divorce will be. This effect is not stronger for the joint odds, which refutes our hypothesis. More importantly, the effect is stronger on the female odds than on the male odds. This is marginally significant for the full sample and significant for the female sample. In other words, a short search period primarily increases women's odds of leaving the marriage, not men's. This supports our auxiliary hypothesis stating that women are more sensitive to marital problems than men.

Age differences between spouses are also significantly related to marital stability. We first expected that age differences would be associated with a greater likelihood of a joint divorce. In both Tables 4 and 5, we see partial evidence for this. When the husband is younger than the wife, the couple is more likely to divorce than when they are of more or less the same age. This effect is strongest for the odds of a joint divorce. Differences between the effect on a joint divorce and the effect on a female divorce are significant in both Tables 4 and 5. The contrast between the effects on a male and a female divorce suggest that men indeed are more sensitive to age differences (Table 5).

When we consider the other type of age heterogamy (i.e. an older husband with a younger wife) we do not generally find the often-documented disruptive effect. Our results show that when the husband is much older, the couple is more rather than less stable than age-homogenous couples. While our theoretical starting point differs from what we observe in the tables, the differences across equations can still be informative. We expected that the husband would be more sensitive toward age differences than the wife, and this is clearly supported. The male odds of divorce are more strongly affected than the female odds when the wife is much younger. These differences are (marginally) significant in both tables and support our auxiliary hypothesis.

Finally, we discuss the effects of our control variables. We first see that there is an effect of sex. This effect essentially replicates the results presented in Table 1. Women more often report own initiative than men. In addition, we see expected effects of marriage duration, period, premarital cohabitation, parental church visits, and urbanized residence. Since the effects are in line with earlier studies, we will not discuss them at length. Important to note are cases where effects are different for the three types of risk. In Table 4 we see that church membership has stronger effects on the joint odds of divorce than on the unilateral odds. In addition, we see that in Table 5 the effect of urbanized residence is significantly stronger for a joint divorce than for unilateral divorces. The interpretation of the effects of these variables has often been in cultural terms. Persons who are not religious and who live in urbanized areas have more lenient norms against divorce than others. That the effects are stronger on the joint odds is consistent with this interpretation. When a marriage is in trouble, couples with more permissive social norms about divorce probably mutually agree on the decision to divorce.

Education is another important control variable to discuss. The wife's education has a positive effect on divorce but this is only true when a female divorce is considered. We also find that the husband's education has a negative effect on her divorce initiative. When we look at the odds of a male divorce, the results are exactly the opposite. The higher the education of the husband, the more likely it is that he will take the initiative to divorce. In addition, women's education has a negative effect on his divorce initiative. These results suggest that a higher education leads to more own initiative. Highly educated persons may be more likely to believe that they can establish an independent household after divorce and they may also have fewer moral objections to divorce.

Conclusions

This study has provided new evidence on the determinants of divorce by incorporating information on who initiated the divorce in the standard event-history approach. We applied this new way of modelling the divorce process to four important and well-documented divorce determinants: the wife's employment, the financial situation of the household, the presence of children, and the quality of the match. The analyses yield several interesting conclusions.

First, we find that the effect of the wife's employment is stronger on women's initiative than on men's initiative to divorce. Theoretically, we argued that there are three interpretations of the effect of the wife's employment. Female employment can make women more independent, which reduces her gains to marriage. At the same time, the wife's employment can be normatively disapproved of by the husband because it is a deviation

from a traditional division of labour. Finally, the wife's employment can reduce the gains to specialization, and such gains are lost for both spouses. All three arguments have been made in the literature, but few studies have been able to separate the three interpretations. Our work presents new evidence on this issue and suggests that the independence argument is most plausible. Effects of the wife's working hours are significant for her divorce but they are insignificant for his divorce and insignificant for a joint divorce. Hence, arguments about specialization and about normative disapproval of working wives receive little support. This conclusion is somewhat in contrast to earlier work on divorce in the Netherlands, which showed that wife's labour market experience and occupational status, both indicators of economic independence, had no clear effects on the risk of divorce (Poortman and Kalmijn, 2002). Perhaps the earlier-noted psychological dimension of independence is relevant here as well. Employment gives women a feeling of self-esteem, which increases the perceived ability to establish a life on one's own. In a sense, employment may not change the actual costs of divorce but it may change the perceived costs of divorce quite substantially.

We also examined the often-documented destabilizing effect of financial problems in marriage. Financial problems were found to have a stronger effect on a female divorce than on a male or a joint divorce. Classic arguments about financial problems point in two directions: social norms about the male breadwinner role and financial strains in marriage. Because we find no effects on a joint divorce, we conclude that the argument about financial strains is less plausible. After all, both spouses should be affected by financial strains, and a joint divorce should be more likely. Since the effects are strong on a female divorce, the argument about social norms seems more plausible. Because husbands are generally the main providers in marriage, the wife may blame the financial problems on the husband. The strong effect of financial difficulties on her divorce might also partly be due to women's greater sensitivity to financial strains. Note that the scale of financial troubles also contains items that may point to underlying behavioural problems. For example, serious financial debts, which is one of the items, may result from a gambling addiction. In this sense, the effect probably reflects more than simply a normative disapproval of the husband not living up to the male breadwinner role.

Another important divorce determinant is the presence of children in marriage. Children are believed to function as marital-specific capital because they raise the exit costs for both husband and wife. The types of exit costs differ, however. For men, a divorce leads to a decline in regular contacts with the children and to a weakening of the father–child bond. For women, the exit costs due to children are more economic in nature. Studies show that divorced women with children are more likely to suffer financial setbacks and are more likely to fall below the poverty line than childless women. Our results suggest that both mechanisms are important, but the evidence is more in favour of the social interpretation than the financial interpretation. The effects of children tend to be stronger on the odds of a male divorce than on the odds of a female divorce.

Finally, we examined the effect of a poor match quality. We expected that the quality of the match would primarily affect the joint odds of divorce. After all, when spouses did not search well and make a poor match, this would affect them both and one spouse should not have greater interests in the divorce than the other. Our results do not lend clear support for this hypothesis. Of the four indicators we examined, there is only one case in which the results favour our hypothesis and that is when the husband is younger than the wife. The other results are not in line with our general hypothesis and can only be interpreted if auxiliary hypotheses and assumptions are considered. One problem with these results is that there were few joint divorces to begin with, which makes it more difficult to find evidence in favour of hypotheses that predict joint divorces.

The distinction between his, her, and their divorce not only provides more direct evidence on the theoretical interpretations behind well-known divorce determinants, but on a more general level also offers insight into the gendered nature of divorce. Scholars in the past have argued that women profit less from marriage than men and therefore speak of 'his' and 'her' marriage. Our results show that a parallel distinction can be made between 'his' and 'her' divorce. First, we found important sex differences in the reports about whether the husband or the wife took the initiative. We think that these differences are a combination of men underreporting own initiative and women overreporting own initiative. If the truth is in the middle, we can conclude that women are twice as likely to take the initiative as men. As such, 'her' divorce occurs more frequently than 'his' divorce. Second, the differential effects of the determinants in our study suggest that most of the determinants work more strongly through 'her' divorce than through 'his' divorce. What determines his divorce is less clear, but men seem to base their decision to divorce to a greater extent than women on the social costs of divorce, particularly on the risk of losing contact with their children.

While our study has presented more direct evidence on the gendered nature of divorce and theoretical interpretations for standard divorce determinants, we also point to some of the possible limitations of our approach. First, retrospective reports about who takes the initiative may not be directly related to the interests that people have in the divorce. We pointed to a tendency to protect self-esteem and a tendency to blame others for failure. It was not possible to study these tendencies empirically but we do not think that they will systematically bias our substantive findings. The effect of wife's employment, for example, would reveal the opposite pattern if bias was involved. Non-working women tend to have less self-esteem and this would make them more likely to protect that esteem. Our finding is that they are less likely to take the initiative, which is contrary to the assumed bias. Second, we have added information about the type of divorce to the models, but our understanding of the process of divorce is still limited. While this was not our main goal, we nonetheless think that our work can give new impetus to incorporating process information in sociological and demographic divorce models.

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